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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

RECENT ROMANCINGS ON HEAVEN AND HELL.

DURING the past year several important contributions have been made to current literature on the subject of heaven and hell, especially the latter. Perhaps the most remarkable contribution of this kind, and certainly the one to create the most widespread sensation, was written by Prof. St. George Mivart, a distinguished Catholic theologian, and was entitled "Happiness in Hell."

According to the tenets of the older and sterner church there is a hell not only for the wicked who defy God's commandments in this life, but also for others who through no fault of theirs are unable to fulfil certain conditions. Professor Mivart, however, lays down the doctrine that the latter class do enjoy a certain happiness, and that their greatest misery lies in the fact that they can not enjoy the beatific vision. Such souls, he maintains, can be happy, though the highest happiness is not within their reach. This view of the complex question was severely assailed by other Catholic writers, and the heretical mouse was quickly disposed of by the orthodox cats, so that the world is now aware that such is not the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

There has also been contributed to literature recently, by an American woman, a drama which gives a novel idea of hell. It represents a man in a dream talking with several of his departed ancestors. One of these told the man that he was in hell, though there was no such place as heaven or hell in the way in which these terms were commonly understood. This man's hell was a condition of feeling in which he had no interest in anything. He felt no enjoyment, no ambition, no pleasure, no passions, no desires. He could go to heaven, he said, if he liked, but he had no desire. He was not interested in anything he might find there or anywhere else.

This condition is to a certain extent exemplified in club life, in society, and in the general lives of the rich and idle. They have exhausted every source of enjoyment and tapped all fountains of enthusiasm. New schemes have to be constantly provided to stimulate even a little their appetite for pleasure. Hell, according to this writer, is this condition carried to its extremity. It is a condition without hope, feeling, ambition, or desires—one of the most horrible states in which any man or woman could be placed.

These two productions may be taken as types of several others, the writers of which put forward descriptions of hell and talk about the recognition of friends in heaven as if they knew all about it. One of these critics

of the unseen has even ventured to write a paper upon "Social Life in Heaven," from the reading of which we must confess the very title deterred us. What can this writer, or any one else, know of social, *i. e.*, companionable or company, life in heaven? It seems to us that the very suggestion that any one knows a whit about it is dishonest.

Such articles as these, however, invariably provoke considerable discussion because man has always been anxious to pierce beyond the veil which closes over the grave and hides from him his hereafter. Some of the most popular books of the present day have been those which treat, and too often treat mischievously, in poetic and exaggerated language, of the glorious heaven or the terrible hell which awaits the soul. Works of this class have been sold by thousands.

Cloudy contemplations and loose and inaccurate attempts to construe obscure revelations have been spun out page after page, and the reader whose curiosity has been moved to buy such books is sometimes frightened into a madhouse by pictures of torment taken from Dante's gloomy poem, and for which there is no warrant in Scripture. On the other hand, heaven is spoken of by some as if it were reserved only for a special set of persons who agree in a blind worship of their own arbitrary ideal; and it was this pharisaic spirit which made Hood exclaim:

"My spirit swells not with the bigot's leaven;
All en I view with toleration thorough,
And have a horror of regarding heaven
As any priest's or prelate's rotten borough."

In all ages and in most countries man has expected to find in the next life somewhat of a continuation of the joys and pleasures of this. The lower the culture of a people, the more rude is the idea that they have of heaven. Pope has reason in his sarcasm when he tells some rude boor to

"Go, like the Indian; in the better life
Expect thy dog, thy bottle, and thy wife."

And the material heaven of the Mahometan, where pleasant rivers and shining waters await the blessed who shall in wondrous gardens meet with crowds of beautiful houri brides, ever fresh and ever young, is sufficient in the eyes of the philosopher at once to condemn the faith which is propagated by conquest, slaughter, and blood, and rewarded by pleasure and lust. Not much more rational was the poetic idea of heaven which the learned Pagans taught. This was a heaven where impalpable but visible shades met and conversed upon matters of earth. Warrior met warrior, poet met poet, and each talked about his art, his family, and his history. It was a notion surely born of the conceit of man, which presumed that the spirits of the departed debated upon the business of their relations on earth.

From these sad dreams of Tartarus, where sat the judges who could not be corrupted by bribes, and where men's actions pleaded for them or against them, almost all modern notions of the future state of the soul seem to have been taken. For eighteen hundred years we have not been able to shake off the effects of classicism. The stories of the Greek and Latin poets taught in our schools have affected the upper classes even more than the Bible has affected the lower.

It was but natural that poetry should be tinted with the hues emanating from these poetic lights. The human mind is slow, indeed, to emancipate itself from error. In Dante we have the three judges, Chiron, the centaur, Cerberus, the rivers of the classic hell, and other classic accessories, to

which are added the punishment dreamed of by the early monks and priests in a too literal construction and application of Hebrew texts. From the tone of Dante's *Inferno* it would seem that at the mouth of the grave God forgot his mercy and assumed the character of a pitiless and revengeful creator, who stooped to exhaust the ingenuity of a human mind in the invention of never-varying and never-ending torments.

In the debate of the fiends and overthrown angels in Milton's sublime poem, the chief of hell, Satan, is reminded by one of his subordinates that the greatness of God's mind can discover greater torments; while those which they at present endure they may, in the future, grow used to; but in Dante this miserable hope is cut off. As in Venice, with an ingenuity which may be called hellish, prisoners were confined in winter in cells below the level of the water, where the air was damp and cold, and their limbs were racked with agues and with frost, and were removed in summer to beneath the leads of the castle, where the sun baked them, and the brain seemed to boil with the fever heat of the blood—so the imagination of Dante runs riot in the conception of alternate frost and fire, and of a perpetual change which shall insure a perpetual pain. How miserably mean is this conception!—how different, indeed, even from the action of a magnanimous man, and how far removed from the mercies of the Almighty Father, we leave it to our readers to say.

While we lament the sad mistake which has led the human mind to dwell upon these fictitious horrors and the still sadder tendency which results in such contributions to the literature of the future as those of Professor Mivart and his fellows, we may nevertheless reasonably debate the question what the future life may be, on the lines followed by Archdeacon Farrar in his article entitled "Conceptions of a Future Life," which appeared in the March number of the *NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, and by the Rev. Reginald Heber Howe in his paper, "An Episcopal View of Heaven," in the October number. As the latter pointed out in his article, by transgressing beyond these limits we enter the region of individual opinion and speculation, to which there is no end. Of these are born the crudest and most grotesque conceptions of the nature of the future life, as various in character as the varieties of the human mind. Every image has been pushed to its utmost and with the fullest literalness of interpretation, and heaven has been conceived of accordingly—a veritable city, with its walls and its gates and its streets, with its trees and its river.

The Christian faith, which is always and in every portion, when closely looked into, found as far above any human policy as heaven is above earth, is wise in not revealing to any of us what heaven is. It may be comforting to some weak souls to dream of a new Heaven as one would of a new estate—a Jerusalem by pleasant waters, without tyrants or judges or enemies to torment without or rogues to break through and steal within. It is so hard to free one's self from earthly ideas that we can pardon the story of Charles Young, the actor, who, before he died, kissed the portrait and the golden lock of hair of his wife whom he had lost fifty years before, and said, "Now I shall see you, my dear Julia." Not to be with God, not to know himself as he himself would be known, not to wonder at the exhaustless power of the All-worker, but again "to see his Julia," was the old man's dream.

Shall we know each other in heaven? The intense desire apparent in the best of minds, of men as well as of women, to resume in heaven the

ties and the society formed on earth, may perhaps be taken as some indication that we shall again know our friends—at least those who are good and true. But it is no proof. It is a foolish and an unlicensed thing to inquire what shall be in heaven. We should remember that we can only properly estimate heaven by generalities and negatives. It is not a place such as we can imagine. If any man tells what it is, that we may be sure it is not. There will be three surprises in heaven—the very greatest at being there ourselves, the second at the absence of those who we thought would be there, and the third at the presence of those who we had condemned and excluded. But beyond that, we may say with Bishop Rust: “It is not for any mortal creature to make a map of that Canaan that lies above; it is, to all of us who live here on the other side of the country, a *terra incognita*.” The contemplation of heaven is, in itself, so sublime that it may tax us to the verge of our imagination. What is beautiful in the perfected earth, what is lovely in all holy love, shall remain to us hereafter. This is all we know. With a full trust in that, we can afford to dispense with the vagaries of ungoverned fancy, and to discard the longings of a distempered sentimentality.

GERTRUDE B. ROLFE.

PROFESSOR TYNDALL AS A MATERIALIST.

IT IS an easy thing to remand Professor Tyndall, without more ado, to the camp of materialists, and thereby attach to his name the opprobrium which falls upon all those who hold that grosser form of materialism which Carlyle characterizes as the “philosophy of mud.” There are materialists and materialists. Professor Tyndall must be carefully distinguished from the spirit-blind devotees of matter, who stoutly insist that the manifold problems of being and destiny find a ready solution in the properties of matter and the law of the conservation of energy. He differs radically at this point from the rank and file of pure materialists. To overlook the difference between them prevents an honest and just estimate of the man, as a scientist and a philosopher. He has already suffered in this regard in many quarters; but now, at the time of his death especially, he merits a fair and tolerant criticism from all, however widely they may differ from him. It is true that Professor Tyndall finds in matter “the promise and potency of every form and quality of life.” Nevertheless, he frankly acknowledges the natural limitations to the materialist’s position, viz., that when one has posited the properties and laws of matter he has only removed the difficulties a step farther back; that the analysis is not ultimate: that there is still the genesis of matter, which must be explained; and that there the problem is left in an unsolved and unsatisfactory state. Concerning the famous dictum of German materialism, *Ohne Phosphor, kein Gedanke* (“without phosphorus there can be no thought”) Professor Tyndall, in his *Scientific Limit of the Imagination*, comments as follows:

“This may or may not be the case, but even if we knew it to be the case the knowledge would not lighten our darkness. On both sides of the zone here assigned to the materialist, he is equally helpless. If you ask him where is this matter, of which we have been discoursing, who or what divided it into molecules, who or what impressed upon them this necessity of running into organic forms, he has no answer.”

He recognizes a mystery which materialism cannot remove, and that,